Joseph Koch
819 14TH ST. N.E.
Auburn, WA. 98002
(AC 206) 833 7784

ML BULLETIN

Publication of the Magic Lantern Society
of the United States and Canada
Vol. I, No. 1, April 1979

Chairman, Joe Koch
819 14th Street NE
Auburn, Washington 98002

Editor, Leora Wood Wells
7101 Woodland Drive
Springfield, Virginia 22151

ML BULLETIN

With this issue, Volume I, Number 1, The ML Bulletin begins quarterly publication as the official communication medium of the Magic Lantern Society of the United States and Canada. Each issue will contain some or all of the following sections:

- an article on some historical or technical aspect of magic lanterns
- an item on a personal experience in collecting magic lanterns or giving shows
- a news update section on activities of the society and of individual members
- a question and answer column through which members can exchange information about lantern manufacturers, artists, distributors, types of fuel, etc.
- a list of newly published articles on magic lanterns or on the society
- a list of lanterns, slides, literature and related items members wish to buy, sell or trade.

Contributions needed. All of these sections will be based on material contributed by members. How useful and interesting the Bulletin is will depend upon the volume and quality of material submitted. Please send all items for publication to Leora Wood Wells, Editor, ML Bulletin, 7101 Woodland Drive, Springfield, Virginia 22151. Length for historical, technical and personal experience items 250-500 words.

ML SOCIETY: THE FIRST YEAR

Formed in 1978 by Joe and Alice Koch (pronounced Cook), the Magic Lantern Society of the United States and Canada enrolled about 25 members during its first year. Each member received a copy of an illustrated pamphlet, The Origins of the Motion Picture, published by the Science Museum, London, a list of other members, and several information mailings prepared by Chairman Koch. Advertisements in two national publications, an article in the August, 1978 issue of Popular Photography, and word of mouth publicity brought more than 175 inquiries. The society hopes to hold annual meetings when conditions permit.

In addition to publishing a quarterly bulletin, the society hopes to develop a master file of information on lantern and slide manufacturers, artists and distributors, and literature on magic lanterns and related optical devices. This information will be available for research purposes to all members.

At the request of Chairman Koch, society member Bob Bishop of Seattle, Washington, prepared a mailing piece outlining the principal purposes of the organization. These include establishing social contact among members of like interests, collecting and disseminating information about magic lanterns, encouraging presentation of magic lantern shows to expand interest beyond collectors to other adults and children who may know nothing of the use of the magic lantern in earlier generations, and establishing a medium for buying, selling or trading lanterns.

An informal survey of the membership revealed that most members favor a single national organization with local groups forming if desired, under an informal structure that can grow and change as membership increases. Most members also favored including collectors of vintage movie equipment and kinetic and optical devices since these are so closely related to magic lanterns.

REVIVING A LOST ART: PRESENTING THE MAGIC LANTERN SHOW

Society Chairman Joe Koch, a retired naval officer, and his wife Alice headed the White River Valley Historical Society for four years, but their duties with that organization did not diminish their other activities. During the past 10 years, they have given more than 100 magic lantern shows.

"We do not charge for the shows," Joe reports. "but we get back more than we give. We learn from each performance, and we like keeping the lantern alive for people of all ages. We give shows for historical groups, service clubs and church organizations, school and college groups and in senior citizen centers, tailoring the show to the interests and ages of our audiences. We participate in town celebrations and folk life festivals, and we gave a lot of shows during the Bicentennial activities.

"Since we have 10,000 slides, we can chose among historical, industrial and commercial slides, business ads, song slides, biblical stories, fairy tales and children's activities, slides showing old cars, trains and ships, and many other topics. Alice prepares the shows; I project and narrate them. Our shows usually run about 45 minutes. Our most demanding performance was five continuous shows for our local high school. An English story called "The Young Potato Roasters" is an especial favorite with children.

"We get a lot of questions after each show, about the history of the lantern, how it works and how the slides are made. We have 17 lanterns, but the one we use in our shows is a 1906 projector with a 1904 screw base, a 400 watt bulb and a cooling fan which we installed.

"One audience we'll never forget consisted of 500 hobgoblins--Girl Scouts in full Halloween regalia! The most unusual setting for a performance was a mortuary, selected on a hot summer night because of its air-conditioned comfort.

"All of this started when we saw a lantern show at an historical society meeting in Tacoma, Washington. We were so intrigued we decided immediately that this would be our hobby. Our first lantern, purchased in Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop in London, was a 'Laterna Gloria' in its original box with nursery rhyme and fairytale slides. Since then we have bought lanterns in Belgium and in Eastern, Midwestern and West Coast states in the USA.

"We've bought two collections of slides. One, from a man in Salinas, California, contained many advertising slides. The other, which we obtained from the wife of an itinerant minister from Lincoln, Nebraska, consisted of 4365 slides out of his collection of 25,000. Imagine the fun of going through 17 apple boxes of slides!"

COLLECTING MAGIC LANTERNS: THE GIFT, A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Willeroy and Leora Wells developed their interest in magic lanterns as a result of their close association with the graphic arts. Willeroy is Creative Director of a large firm that carries museum work from initial conception through research, design, production and installation of exhibits. Leora is a researcher and writer. She tells here about one of their experiences as magic lantern collectors:

He was an unlikely looking millionaire--the wiry little man with the heavy accent and threadbare black suit--but he was one of the most successful antique dealers in the entire Northeast section of the country. His shop was the old-fashioned kind that our family called "a good pokin' place." Every conceivable kind of object could be found there, if you looked long enough and in the right places: miscellaneous bits of hardware, fans, purses, toys; fine paintings sandwiched between old ice skates and sets of Victorian chairs, shelves of china and glassware.

Nothing was marked. What it cost--or indeed, whether you got it at all-depended entirely upon the dealer's mood of the moment and what he thought of you. One of our favorite sports was to watch him dem ish people he didn't like, as he did one day when an expe ively dressed woman examined an oriental platter worth, a the time, about $30. "How do I know it is a genuine antique?" she asked accusingly.

He mumbled an unintelligible reply and turned the plate over to show its bottom, worn by many years of use.

"How much is it?" she asked.

He looked her straight in the eye without blinking. "Four hundred and fifty dollars," he said.

With an unladylike snort, she marched out of the shop. The dealer permitted himself the tiniest shadow of a smile, but his eyes twinkled as he stole a sidelong glance at us and other customers who had watched the little drama.

Now, having driven away the arrogant rich lady, he turned his attention to us. We had found a beautiful magic lantern with a vertical red body, brass chimney and a fine set of pictorial glass slides. Our small daughter was holding it lovingly in her hands. "How much is this?" she asked.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," he said. Her face fell and her brown eyes mirrored her disappointment. "Oh, 'scuse me," he said playfully. "I meant two dollars and fifty cents. Would that suit you better?"

It was my turn to look astonished. He glanced up at me. "I know what it is," he said, as if I had challenged him. "And I know what it's worth. My price is $2.50."

He died a few years after that, as we discovered when we entered the open door of the shop and found everything gone but piles of trash on the floor. Something caught my eye, and I stopped to pick it up. It was a magic lantern slide, a photograph of Thorwaldsen's lyrical bas-relief, "Morning."

Nostalgia for the strange, shrewd little man overwhelmed me. I tried to speak, but had to clear my throat three times before I succeeded. "I think this was meant for us," I said finally. "It's as if he'd played one last joke and left us a gift--a gift that only we would recognize and understand."

We closed the door as we left. The next time we passed, the shop was boarded up. Even the sign with his name in large gilt letters was gone. But the memory of our quixotic friend lives on, secured by our cherished lantern and the graceful slide that had brought him back to us for one brief moment of farewell.

CAN YOU TELL ME?--QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MAGIC LANTERNS

When you correspond directly with each other in answer to questions, please also share the information through the Bulletin.

Some of the descriptions in queries to the Bulletin are so incomplete it is difficult to provide information in response. In asking for information about your lanterns, please be specific. Include such information as:

- body shape, size, color and general structure (tin, Russian iron, mahogany-based; square, cylindrical, round; red, black, bluish-black, etc.)
- what the chimney is made of and how it is shaped, (brass, tin, straight with brass lip, curved like angular or crinkled stovepipe, "piecrust" top, etc.)
- shape and material of the illuminant device (separate glass or tin lamps, fuel well as self-contained part of lantern, square box with multiple wicks, faucet-like connection for oxyhydrogen, electrical connections, etc.)

. size and type of slide it uses (hand-painted or decal-type art, photographic, rectangular, square, round, mahogany-framed, motion slides, chromatropes, etc.)

. any names, dates or symbols on the lantern, slides or boxes.

Q: I have a lantern and slides with the designation "J. Lizars Manufacturing Optician" and addresses in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Belfast, Aberdeen & Liverpool. The oval plate on the lantern carries the word "Challenge." The wooden slide box contains 3 1/4", square slides of "Nansen's Farthest North Expedition" and scenes of Russia in the 1800's. Can anyone tell me when this lantern was manufactured or the type of illuminant it used? W.H. Jenkins.

A: Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) was a Norwegian scientist, arctic explorer, statesman and humanitarian who hoped to reach the North Pole by drifting with the ice floes. He never made it, but gained much valuable scientific information in his voyages 1910-1914. He was the first Norwegian Minister to Great Britain 1906-1908. He was noted for his work in famine relief and repatriation of Russian war prisoners and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922.

Since your slides relate to Nansen's work, it is likely the lantern itself dates from early in the 20th century. Your question about the illuminant requires fuller description of the structure of lantern.

Q: I am looking for projection equipment made by Jules Duboscq-Soleil in France in the 1870's because of its use in the Franco-Prussian War Pigeon Post. Do you have any information along this line? Jack Rubin, 238 Moore Street, Princeton, NJ 08540.

A: Jules Duboscq (1817-1886) was the son-in-law of Paris optician Francois Soleil. He was a commercial maker of optical instruments and exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. In 1852, he patented a device called a Stereofantascope or Bioscope which combined photographs with a spinning-disc device developed by Plateau which gave an impression of motion.

Q: Is a platinotype stereo unusual? I think it's a stereo on platinum paper. Rich Lemmon, 4206 Elderwood Drive, Seabrook, TX 77586.

A: A platinotype is a photographic print made by a process using a platinum salt. It yields a more permanent print than those obtainable with silver salts. Does anyone know the answer to Mr. Lemmon's question?

Q: Our museum has about 10,000 photographic lantern slides, the remainder of a much larger collection formerly used in public lectures. We would like to be in touch with people familiar with conservation of large numbers of slides of this type. Pamela Haas and Patricia R. Powell, Photo Collection, Library, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, NYC 10024.

A: Perhaps Mike Smith, Secretary of the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain, Newlynn, Nether Lane, East Sussex, England can be helpful. Also, photo slide conservationist members please contact Ms. Haas or Ms. Powell.

Q: I have a projector apparently made by Incan Art-O-Scope Company of Boston with lens by Darlot Opticians of Paris. What appears to be its original bulb still operates. It came with a wooden carrying case and 21 glass slides. Have you any information on this projector? Does it have value for the collector? Richard S. Tucker, 27 Norwich Road, Wellesley, MA 02181.

A: All types of projectors have become collectors' items. A few electrical ones were in use in the 1890's, but most lanterns using this light source were made in the 20th century. The French lens maker you mentioned was noted for high quality products. The Boston company could be either the manufacturer or the distributor. Since you live near Boston, I suggest you check with the public library to see whether it has city directories of the appropriate date which may carry advertisements for this company. Does anyone have more specific information for Mr. Tucker?

Q: At a recent Columbus, Ohio trade fair, someone noticed one of my non-electric slide projectors and commented off-handedly that it was too bad such projectors are practically worthless. Any comment? David E. Wagner, 11460 Poplar Creek Road, R 2, Baltimore, Ohio 43105.

A: Ridiculous! All projectors are now selling for vastly inflated prices, and pre-electric ones are generally of more interest to collectors than later ones.

BUY/SELL/TRADE

Have large slide projector circa 1880's, 1x2'. Only markings "Triumph" on lamphouse and "Baird Eclipse" on slide carrier. Will trade for Zeiss Contax equipment or best offer over $400. Ed Kosman, P.O. Box 37, Midway City, CA 92655.

Have six mint-condition 2 1/2x8" slides with three 2" circular illustrations on each. Five appear to relate to temperance, one to small children. Will sell or trade for stereo views. Make offer. Ray A. Walker, Clock House Apts, North Conway, NH 03860.

Would like to obtain painted slides, rectangular 1 1/2x6" or round 5" diameter. Howard Levy, Mayes Way, Manchester, GA 31816.